

Chapter 3 /  
**Battlefield of Histories**  
Competition over  
authenticity and heritage  
in an urban region in  
eastern Netherlands /  
Linde Egberts



## Introduction

A heritage revival on a European scale will be ineffective if it is not embedded in heritage practices on a regional or local scale. Chapter 2 discusses the way in which the early medieval past is remembered and forgotten in today's Alsace, a region with great symbolic value with respect to European peace and unification. In this chapter, I discuss heritage practices and the role of the experience of authenticity in a relatively new region: the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region in the eastern part of the Netherlands, where various interpretations and selections of the past compete for attention and investment.

Different experiences of authenticity sometimes clash, leading to heated debates on how to treat a local, but internationally valuable historical heritage. The experience of authenticity can vary in many ways, and one can distinguish several different forms of authenticity which play a part in the dynamics of heritage and identities in the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region and which are sometimes the cause of competition and debate. Different forms of authenticity have already been discussed in Chapter 1, of which authenticity of place and of material are the ones most familiar to archaeologists and heritage professionals. Other forms of authentic experience can be called referential, relational and creative.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter, I briefly introduce the region and discuss developments in two historic places located within it: the old Valkhof in Nijmegen and Schuytgraaf, a new housing area on the southern edge of Arnhem. I use these examples to show how heritage works on regional and local scales and to stress the importance of thinking carefully about authenticity.

## The Arnhem Nijmegen City Region

The Arnhem Nijmegen region is a rapidly urbanizing area, lying between the largest Dutch cities in the west of the country (Amsterdam, The Hague, and Rotterdam) and the German Ruhr

River area in the east. Only recently the national government started developing policies which treat the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen as constituting a single coherent region. In the Fourth Report on Spatial Planning of 1988 the region was designated a Daily Urban System (DUS), an urban network of national and international importance; and the report stressed the need for spatial planning on this regional scale, a task assigned to the new governmental entity, the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region, which has been commissioned to coordinate the process of urbanization in the region as a whole.

Welding two cities together in a brand new region is, of course, easier said than done. Historically speaking, Arnhem and Nijmegen share several important similarities in their development and character. The former lies on the northern side of the Rhine River, twenty kilometers from Nijmegen, which lies on the southern side of the Waal River. They mirror each other and are rapidly growing towards each other. Their own historiographies describe the cities as each other's competitors throughout most of their history. My impression is that even today this is a region that does not want to tell the story of a shared past, but rather sees its two main cities as separate entities, competing in the past as well as in the present. The region's name already reveals a part of its identity problem: it is a geographic area in which both expanding cities have strong autonomous historical identities. In business, culture, and politics they are more competitors than partners. Each city cherishes its own heritage, has different memories, and has suffered different traumas. This is the background against which a new identity for this *composite region* is being promoted by governments and private organizations.

In my research, it became clear that this competition between Arnhem and Nijmegen has an influence on heritage practices in the region. The historic episodes with which one city is mainly associated are envied by the other. Nijmegen is known as the Netherlands' oldest city on account of its role as a Roman town, while Arnhem is actively promoting the Roman

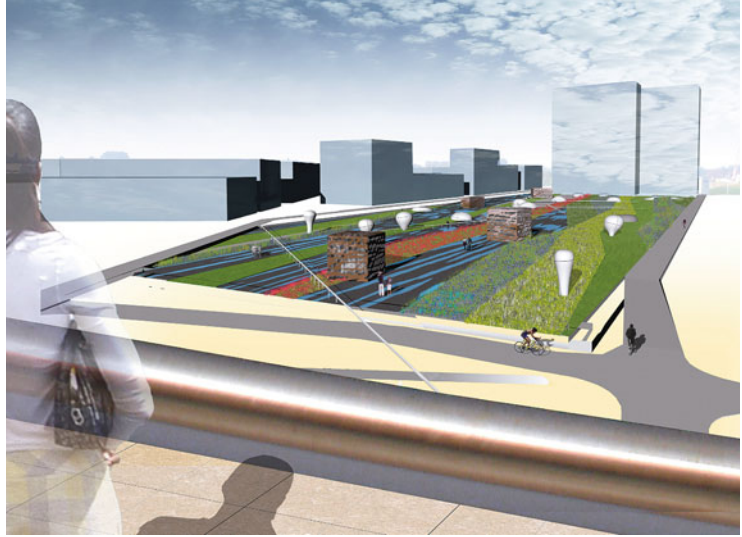
finds in one of its newer residential areas. Arnhem is internationally known for a battle which took place there in the Second World War, but the city puts little effort into emphasise this part of its past. The damage Nijmegen suffered in the war, due to friendly fire from Allied air forces, is much less well known, but it is there that a national liberation museum is now being built, not least because Nijmegen is eagerly seeking recognition of its war trauma.

Now I will turn to two cases to illustrate how competition works in the Arnhem Nijmegen City region. As will become clear, they show not only that competition between the two cities plays a role on a local scale, but also that competition can arise between several historic themes, and that, most importantly, there can be competition between different forms of authenticity.

### Schuytgraaf

The first case is that of Schuytgraaf, a large residential development project of the 1990s, located 5 kilometers southwest of Arnhem's city centre. With its approximately 6,250 new houses, this area provides housing for about 15,000 people. The name Schuytgraaf derives from the historical name given to the area in which a canal functioned as a watercourse ('schutgraaf').<sup>2</sup> In the master plan, developed by the Rotterdam-based agency KCAP, the existing structures in the formerly agrarian landscape of the Overbetuwe were respected and taken as a starting point for a new layout. The designers wanted to integrate built and green structures, making Schuytgraaf into a transition zone between the city and the countryside, and the existing landscape structures and elements were used as much as possible to help realize this idea.<sup>3</sup> While the agrarian cultural landscape was a crucial element for the designers of the initial master plan, they turned out to be only the first of several groups competing to determine which parts of Schuytgraaf's history should receive the most prominence.

The winning design for Schuytgraaf was “De Landing”. The artist impression shows the future terrain with parachute-like structures in Arnhem, the Netherlands (courtesy of CHORA, 2009).

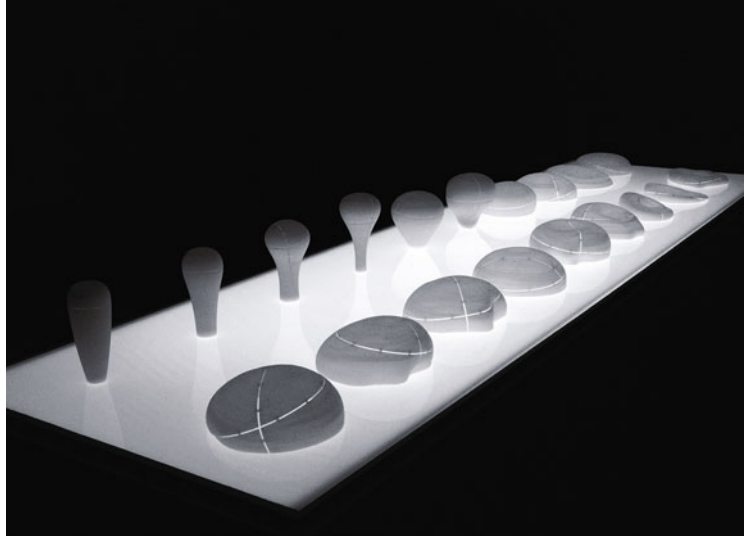


In the late 1990s, the preparations began for the construction phase, which included archaeological research. Local archaeologists found considerable material from various periods: remains of a hunting camp from the Stone Age, traces from the Middle and Late Iron Ages, a Roman settlement, and a medieval farmhouse, among others. The remains of unknown German and British soldiers were also found, as well as parts of a German aircraft – not surprisingly, as the front line ran straight across Schuytgraaf during the last months of the Second World War. The interest of amateur historians of the Second World War in these bodily remains far exceeded the resources, knowledge, and experience available to professional archaeologists to document and research them properly. Most of the traces have by now been lost without being thoroughly documented, but many of the objects have been moved to the nearby Airborne Museum.

The archeologists valued the findings from the Iron Age very highly, which led to their conservation *in situ* and the protection of the area as a national monument. This made it impossible to develop Schuytgraaf's central commercial zone near the Arnhem-Schuytgraaf railway station as originally intended.<sup>4</sup>



CHORA studied and reconstructed various stages of landing of a parachute with scientific exactitude for their design of "De Landing" in Schuytgraaf, Arnhem, the Netherlands (courtesy of CHORA, 2009).



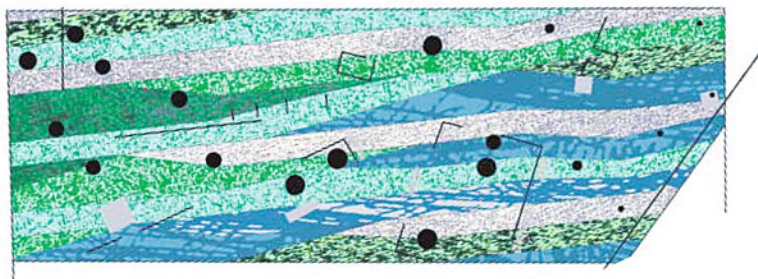
A design competition was held to develop an alternative location for this zone, respecting the archaeological archive by not planning any built structures at the originally chosen location, but still allowing it to form the entrance to Schuytgraaf and to become the 'memory' of the new development area.<sup>5</sup>

The selection committee wanted, among other things, a design that would tell the story of Schuytgraaf's past. It did not favor any one layer of history over another, leaving it up to the competition entrants to make the choice and to decide how this story would be told. The winning design was submitted by Chora, an architecture and city planning office from London, founded and directed by *Smart City*-specialist Raoul Bunschoten.

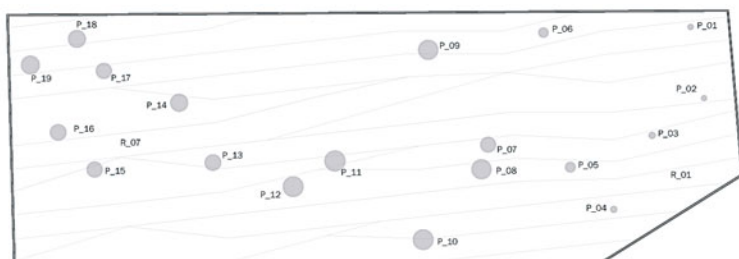
"The monument will be a field that contains a landscape based on the natural flood zone of the nearby River Rhine, [with] specially designed railings with texts about the archaeological finds that remain in the ground, four pavilions that house different programs and form the settings for the last layer, the parachutes, shaped freely on different stages of a jump from a plane."<sup>6</sup>

In this winning proposal, most of the site's historical layers

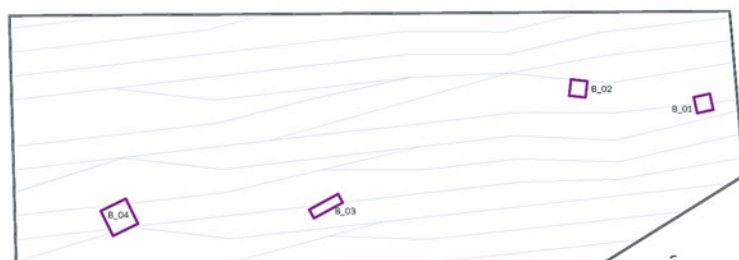
Ground



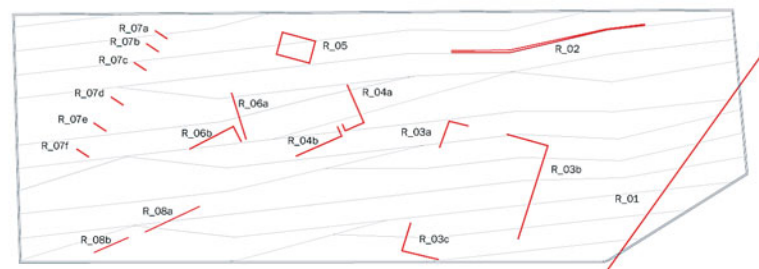
Parachutes



Pavilions



Railings





will be represented on the exhibition railings, that lie within the flood plain of the Rhine River. The designers selected the most recent historical layer to play the main part in this design, creating a monument for the Polish parachutists who landed between Schuytgraaf and Driel. Several detailed imitations of parachutes in various stages of landing will petrify (in concrete) on the location. The designers felt that the role of these Poles was being neglected in the memorials of Operation Market Garden and therefore wanted to pay tribute to them here.

Although the original KCAP master plan contained other functions for the archaeological field, the KCAP architects believe that the Chora design adds a valuable layer of stories and meanings to it.<sup>7</sup> The KCAP and Chora designers thus agree on the value of integrating local histories in the spatial design of Schuytgraaf. However, most inhabitants of Schuytgraaf, who form the main target group for this storytelling, did not have any notion of the area's history before the first houses were built, and a discourse analysis by Robert Opdorp shows that the designer's ideas about integrating histories in a development plan by referring to them in the spatial context thus did not have the expected results.

This brief discussion shows how relatively little the new inhabitants tend to 'adopt' from the stories that the planners and designers want to tell about this historical, but completely transformed area.<sup>8</sup> The designers assumed that identities can be created in the planning process by using references to local histories, but Opdorp showed how little of this came across to the inhabitants of Schuytgraaf. They do, in fact, have an interest in the Second World War, as witnessed by their organized group bus trips to the nearby commemorations of Operation Market Garden. World War Two buffs have even proved their (destructive) fascination with local history by the scale on which war remains have been illegally excavated; a security company has repeatedly informed the police about it, and several of those responsible for the digging were arrested.<sup>9</sup>

This case makes clear how differently designers, archaeologists, local citizens, and military history enthusiasts value the

Maps of "De Landing"  
by CHORA in Arnhem,  
the Netherlands  
(courtesy of CHORA,  
2009).

past. Schuytgraaf's master plan is based on its agrarian cultural landscape; the inhabitants are mainly interested in the history of the Second World War; and at the heart of the area there lies an Iron Age archaeological monument which will be devoted mainly to telling the story of Operation Market Garden in 1944. It is fascinating to see how these groups all have their own way of valuing the past and how these opinions collide. It is a curious fact that local war buffs illegally dig up war paraphernalia in an area dedicated to research on the early Iron Age, and that this pre-historic heritage site is appreciated mainly by archaeologists, but will be shared by parachute-shaped exhibition pavilions devoted to the Second World War. This is how heritage practices work and compete on a local scale.

### The reconstruction of the Valkhof tower

The second case I want to discuss here is the Valkhof in Nijmegen. Today it is a lush, historic park overlooking the Waal River, and the site of two medieval chapels. This is the place where traces of a Roman fort and Carolingian castle are preserved *in situ*. It contains the remains of a castle built by the Emperor Barbarossa that was demolished in the late eighteenth century by the provincial government, which had earlier moved from Nijmegen to Arnhem. Soon after the demolition, a park was laid out according to a design by the famous Dutch garden architect Johan David Zocher Jr., incorporating what remained of the castle: St. Nicholas's chapel and St. Martin's chapel. The Valkhof is a place of memory that incorporates traces of many different periods, most of which are not visible at the present time.

For several decades groups have been campaigning for the reconstruction of the main tower (donjon) of Barbarossa's castle on the Valkhof. The fact that it was demolished by the regional government in Arnhem intensifies the feeling of loss among local history enthusiasts. A reconstruction would restore a part of Nijmegen's past glory as a regional power



The Valkhof park  
and its chapels in  
Nijmegen, the Nether-  
lands (Linde Egberts,  
2012).

centre, so little of which is evident today. In 2005, Nijmegen celebrated its 2000th anniversary with a full year of historical projects and festivities. One of these projects was the reconstruction in scaffolding and printed cloth of the twelfth-century Valkhof tower. This temporary reconstruction signaled a new phase in the reconstruction debate, because on that occasion the Valkhofvereniging (Valkhof society) circulated a petition among the visitors in support of the permanent reconstruction of the donjon. In 2006 an official referendum was held among Nijmegen's citizens, in which 60% of them voted for reconstructing the tower. Its reconstruction would not only be a reminder of Nijmegen's past glory; it would also be an opportunity to experience the tower and the Valkhof *as it really was*. Thus, in this reconstruction debate, we see a form of *referential* authenticity clashing with other forms of authenticity.

The results of the referendum obliged the city administration to carefully consider the feasibility of a reconstruction. This was a complicated task, since both the Zocher park and the





archaeological remains beneath it are national monuments; the Valkhof is also part of a townscape conservation area and, therefore, cannot be easily be altered. Another problem is posed by the serious lack of historical sources: no floor plans are available, leaving us with only paintings from the sixteenth century onwards, most of which picture the Valkhof as a symbol of Nijmegen, with little hesitation about conveying minor topographical and architectural inaccuracies.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, many alterations may have been made to the tower in the centuries between its construction and the time when these paintings were made.

In the meantime, the city council of Nijmegen has embraced municipal history as the basic selling point in the city's marketing campaign. Nijmegen is said to be the oldest city in the Netherlands, but hardly any visible traces exist to support that claim. Reconstructing the Valkhof tower would be a fine opportunity to partially restore the city's historical appearance. Additionally, it would generate more tourist interest and create an attractive new business area in the city – further reasons for the council to approve the reconstruction plans.

Yet the local heritage experts and the national service for cultural heritage have objections to the reconstruction, because of the potential damage to the national monuments and the townscape conservation area. Heritage professionals see it as their task to protect what is *authentic* in terms of *place* and *material*. Heritage expert Sandra Langereis adds the objection that the demolition of the Valkhof castle by the province of Gelderland, despite local protests, was an act of breaking with the past and is part of the biography of the Valkhof. The same impetus accounts for the development of the Romantic Zocher park, in which the ruins of the castle were meant to offer strollers opportunities for the nostalgic contemplation of Nijmegen's great past.<sup>11</sup> Langereis stresses the *creative authenticity* of the Valkhof park as a monument of park design. She pleads for a biographical approach to the Valkhof, in which the current park can be read as a *palimpsest*: the result of centuries of building and demolition, of carved-

The Valkhof tower was reconstructed by using scaffolding and printed textile (courtesy of the municipality of Nijmegen, 2005).



Arnhem

John Frost Bridge

Schuytgraaf

Rhine

Park Lingezegen

Waal

Valkhof

Nijmegen



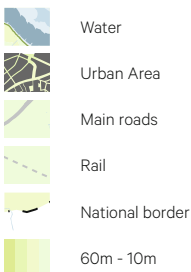


View on the temporary reconstruction of the Valkhof tower in Nijmegen, the Netherlands, 2005 (courtesy of the municipality of Nijmegen, 2005).

in histories and deliberately erased traces.<sup>12</sup> Rebuilding the long-lost tower would mean erasing a part of Nijmegen's more recent and no less valuable history. The current result of centuries of breaking down and building up again should be approached as an *authentic whole*, as well.

The ongoing debate over the reconstruction of the Valkhof tower displays the dynamics at work between a number of competing views: the inhabitants' wish for an *authentic* historic experience; the city's desire for better branding through visualizing Nijmegen's antiquity; real estate interests; and the opinion of heritage experts, who would rather preserve the authentic *place, material* and multilayered past of the Valkhof than undertake a reconstruction which, given the absence of source material, would necessarily be historically inaccurate. As of today, it is still not clear which form of authenticity will win the competition over the future of the Valkhof.

Arnhem Nijmegen  
region  
1:150,000



## Historic places and routes

Several remarks are worth making at this point about heritage routes in the Arnhem Nijmegen City Region. In the Netherlands, this region is playing a pioneering role in the development of heritage routes with a focus on experiences. Cooperation between the regional tourist office, local heritage institutions, and various governmental entities has resulted in the creation of a heritage portal on the internet which presents the region's past on demand and offers virtual access to specific locations. It concentrates on three important historical layers: the Roman period, the Middle Ages, and the liberation at the end of the Second World War. Entrepreneurs – hotels, restaurants and other service providers – offer package deals including everything needed for an historical experience of the region. The website, *Exciting History*, is available on both personal computers and smartphones and can be navigated using a map, a timeline, or a collage of pictures. It offers written stories, images, and sound recordings of eye-witnesses to events during the Second World War. *Exciting History* is not a route or trail; it is a collection of places that are presented thematically. As chapter 4 will show, the website is quite successful and will be partially developed further into an international

The John Frost Bridge was the place of fierce fighting in the Battle of Arnhem (1944), the Netherlands. Today it is a location of the heritage tourism project *Exciting History* (Linde Egberts, 2012).





The Airborne Museum in Oosterbeek is one of the locations of *Exciting History* and offers an immersive experience of Operation Market Garden, the Netherlands (Linde Egberts, 2012).

Liberation Route. *Exciting History* seeks to offer an historical experience, and it seems to be succeeding, at least partially. Yet the project's interactivity is at a rather low level, keeping the audience from contributing very much to the project and thus diminishing the possibility of its really *co-creating* this historical experience, rather than just *consuming* it. The website does offer some geographical information, but this goes little further than putting dots on a very general map. The sense of the landscape, spatial framework, and coherence among historical places is lost in the online presentation. Little attention was paid to creating a desire to travel or to conveying what it would be like to visit the region and experience its heritage at first hand. The historical information is correct, but it hardly embeds the region's history in a larger context, either spatially or temporally. While this pioneering initiative is attractive, accessible, and fairly successful, it still has not exploited a number of opportunities to turn the heritage of the region into a truly co-created experience, one with possessing a much richer content with regard to landscape, historical context, and connections with the rest of the world.<sup>13</sup>

## A battlefield of histories

The Arnhem Nijmegen City Region is divided by rivers, historical frontiers, cultural differences, and a deeply rooted sense of competition between the two cities, a competition, which, as we have seen, is reflected in the region's heritage practices. The case of Schuytgraaf showed how various groups value the elements of a local heritage differently, and how this fact could give rise to competition among the public, a design jury, and archaeologists. This competition went as far as war buffs illegally digging up Second World War paraphernalia, *rescuing* it from feared destruction, but at the same time destroying the archaeological soil archive and along with it the possibility of gaining greater insight in the recent history of Schuytgraaf. In a few years, the winning period will be the Second World War, since the new pavilions in the heart of Schuytgraaf will protect the older remains, but refer poetically to the landing of Polish Allied Forces in Operation Market Garden (1944) using parachute-like forms. It is quite remarkable that this is taking place in Arnhem; for until the present time the city has found it too painful to actively recall the Battle of Arnhem other than in traditional commemorative ceremonies and monuments.

Various forms of authenticity have come into play in the background in the case of Schuytgraaf. In the case of the Valkhof, a heated public debate centres around different ideas about what is authentic and about what should be protected and evoked. This competition between places, periods, and forms of authenticity is very characteristic of heritage practices throughout Europe. It is an important part of the framework in which a new heritage revival has to be embedded, on both the local and the regional scale.

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